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China's Concerns About the Strategic Defense Initiative [redacted]

SUMMARY

Recent Chinese press commentary underscores Beijing's concern that the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) could trigger a new US-USSR arms race and cause the Soviets to abrogate the 1972 Antiballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty. The Chinese fear that this would cause the Soviets to build up their ballistic missile defenses, which could nullify China's independent nuclear deterrent. In response to these concerns, the Chinese are appealing to European and other world leaders in an effort to increase the pressure for limitations of strategic defensive systems. At the same time, the Chinese are attempting to improve their capability to destroy defended targets such as Moscow [redacted]

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The Chinese Position on SDI

Articles in the official Chinese press and individual commentators have expressed the fear that the US Strategic Defense Initiative and the development of antisatellite weapons by both superpowers will expand and accelerate the arms race between the United States and the USSR. The Chinese argue that, the Soviet Union will (1) claim SDI violates the 1972 ABM Treaty (despite U.S. assurances that it does not) (2), abrogate the treaty, and (3) improve the missile defenses around Moscow and throughout the USSR. Chinese propaganda has begun attacking the SDI and the development of antisatellite weapons as an extension of the US-USSR arms race, a continued quest for hegemony by both superpowers, and a grave threat to world peace. [redacted]

Official Chinese statements on arms control itself have been limited to a 1981 proposal--since repeated frequently--that the United States and the Soviet Union each reduce their nuclear weapons by 50 percent, at which point the Chinese would join further arms reduction talks that included all nuclear weapons states. In fact, Beijing almost certainly does not expect to have a direct effect on renewed arms negotiations, nor does it want to place its own small strategic force on the bargaining table. Rather, we believe, the Chinese are appealing to European and other world leaders for a unified stance in favor of a general reduction in nuclear arms and a halt to the development of space-based weapons. [redacted]

The Chinese commentators warn West European leaders that, whether or not future superpower defensive systems are effective against each other's missiles, they could be effective against the much smaller strategic forces of France and the United Kingdom. According to one article, the results could include:

- o Nullification of an independent French or British nuclear deterrent.
- o Drastic weakening of European political influence in the rest of the world.
- o Increasing vulnerability of Europe to nuclear blackmail from the Soviets.
- o Correspondingly greater dependence on the United States for nuclear protection.

The author of the article does not directly draw a parallel between the European and Chinese situations vis-a-vis the Soviet Union, but its implication is unmistakable. [redacted]

In December, before the talks between Secretary Shultz and Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko on the resumption of arms negotiations, the Chinese Ambassador to [redacted] said that the United States had to approach the Soviet Union from a position of strength in order for negotiations to be successful. But he said the SDI would lead to a destabilizing and expensive arms race in outer space. The Ambassador was not convinced that the US offer to share new defensive technology with the Soviets would help to avoid an accelerated arms race. He said that other countries would also have doubts about any cooperative effort between the United States and the Soviet Union on strategic defensive systems. [redacted]

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The Soviet ABM Problem

Chinese nuclear strategy is one of minimal, but credible, deterrence against a nuclear attack by any nation, but we believe the Chinese regard the USSR as their only likely nuclear opponent. [redacted] The Chinese are concerned that SDI will trigger a greater effort by the Soviets to improve their own ballistic missile defenses. An improved Soviet strategic defense that could intercept surviving Chinese missiles thus becomes a major threat to China's nuclear deterrent. [redacted]

The ability to threaten Moscow and other cities in the European USSR is important to Beijing's concept of nuclear deterrence. [redacted] US attaches and other military visitors to China are frequently asked about Soviet ABM capabilities, about ABM radars and missiles, and about the ABM potential of

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new Soviet surface-to-air missiles (SAMs). For example, in February 1984, a US briefing team visiting Beijing was asked repeatedly about Soviet ABMs despite US efforts to keep the discussion on the SDI. [redacted]

A perfectly timed attack using all of China's deployed [redacted] ICBMs could theoretically overwhelm Moscow's defenses if the Soviet ABM radars were unable to distinguish between incoming decoys and reentry vehicles. However, in the more likely event that some of China's ICBMs were destroyed in a Soviet preemptive attack, the chances of successful retaliation against Moscow would be reduced. In such a situation China's ability to carry out a precisely timed and coordinated attack would be doubtful. Certainly, the Chinese could not be confident of its success, but neither could the Soviets be assured of Moscow's safety, given the imperfection of their defense. [redacted]

Moreover, some of these same uncertainties will remain even if--as we expect--the strategic defense of Moscow outpaces China's ability to attack it and, in any case, no defense would be 100-percent effective. [redacted]

If the 1972 ABM Treaty is abrogated, or if the Soviets develop their own version of the Strategic Defense Initiative, however, they could significantly improve their ability to defend against any retaliatory missile attack by China. Abrogation of the treaty would enable the Soviets to expand Moscow's ABM defenses and deploy ABMs nationwide. Such an expansion would reduce the measure of deterrence the Chinese now hold as a result of their ability to threaten undefended population centers in the European USSR and cities in the Soviet Far East. [redacted]

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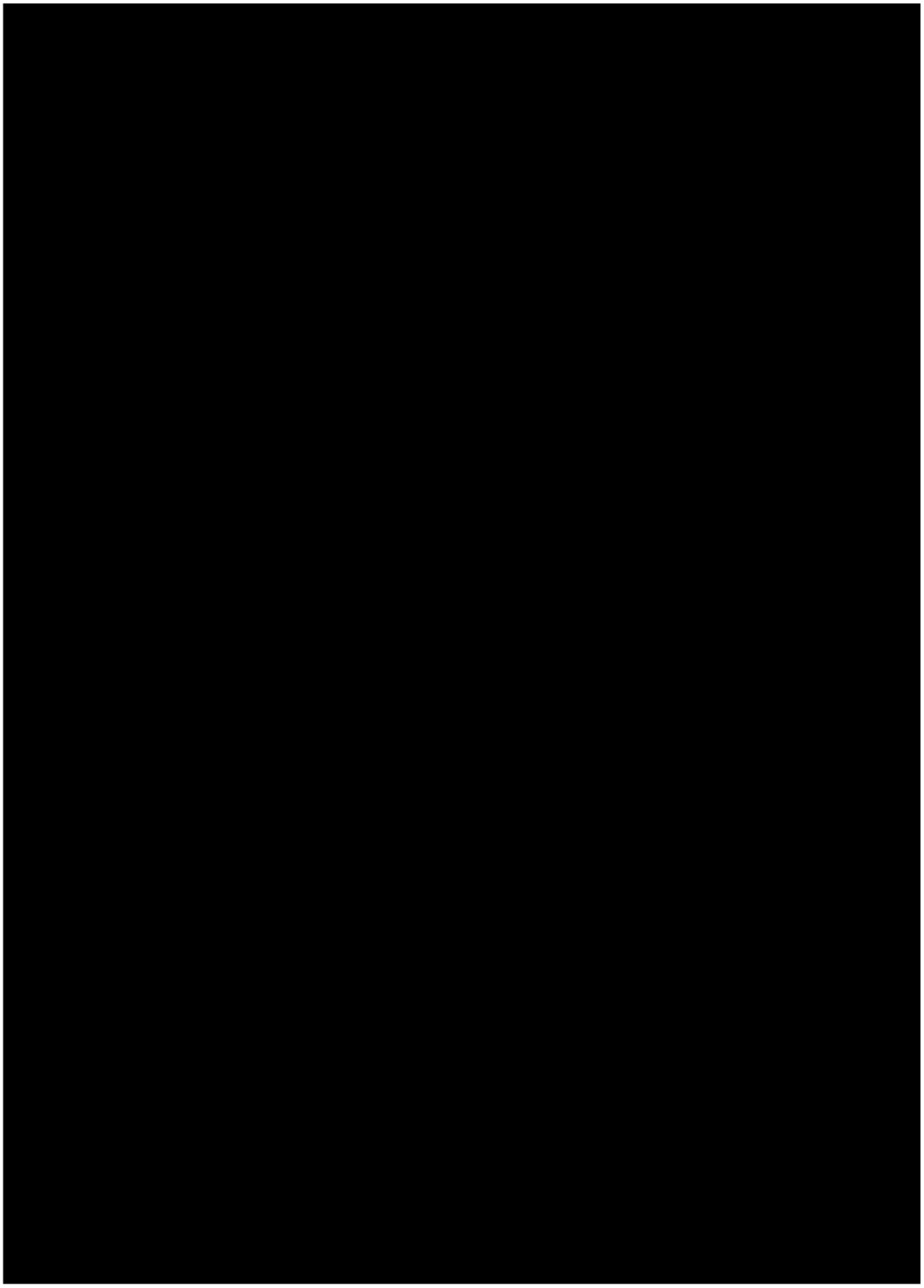

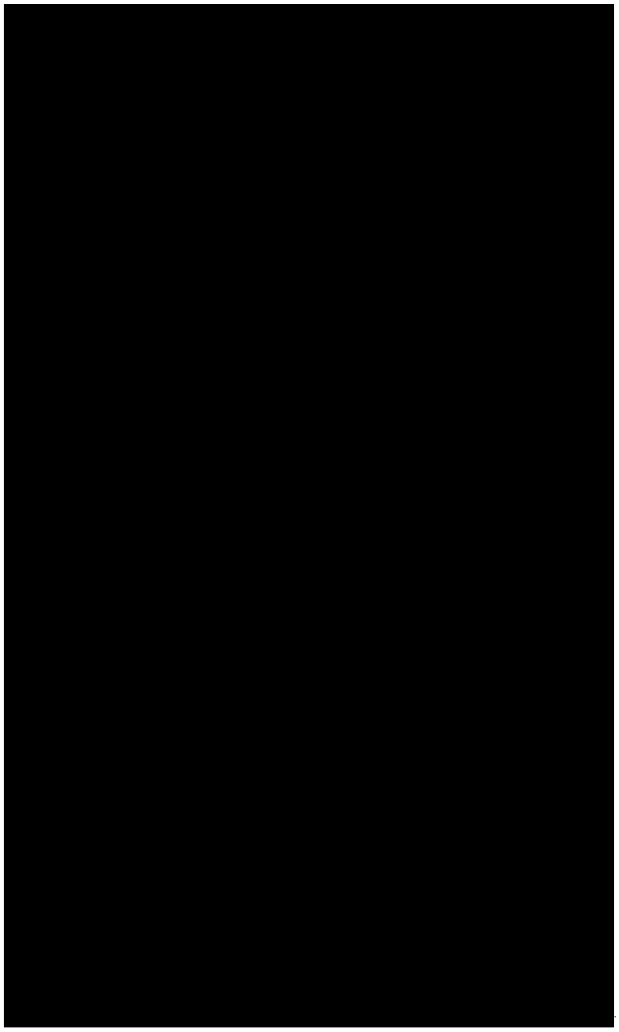

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